NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0829 MAY 21, 1976
MAY 21, 1976
CHARLES MEDD

ELECTION '76: THE FINAL STAGE OF THE PRIMARIES

ANNCR:

THE LONG PROCESS OF CHOOSING PARTY CANDIDATES IS NOW APPROACHING THE FINAL STAGE. ON THE LAST TUESDAY IN MAY AND THE FIRST TUESDAY IN JUNE, VOTERS IN TEN STATES WILL CAST BALLOTS, BUT AS CHARLES MEDD POINTS OUT, THE MOST DECISIVE DAY OF ALL STILL MAY BE SOME THREE WEEKS AWAY.

VOICE:

THE STORY OF THE 1976 ELECTION YEAR SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DRAFTED BY A CLEVER MYSTERY WRITER. WE'VE REACHED WHAT SHOULD BE THE LAST CHAPTER OF THE NOMINATING PROCESS WITH LITTLE MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF CLUES AS TO THE OUTCOME. AND WHAT HAPPENS IN THE IMMEDIATE WEEKS AHEAD IS LIKELY TO BE JUST ANOTHER LITERARY DIVERSION. FOR THE NEXT TEN PRIMARY ELECTIONS, TUCKED TOGETHER ON SUCCESSIVE TUESDAYS, ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE MORE EXCITEMENT THAN DEFINITIVE INFORMATION.

THE TEN STATES HAVE MUCH IN COMMON. EACH IS COMPARATIVELY SMALL, AND THUS THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR DELEGATIONS TO THE PARTY NOMINATING CONVENTIONS WILL BE COMPARATIVELY MODEST. AND ALL BUT ONE OF THE STATES ARE FOUND IN EITHER THE SOUTH OR THE WEST, REGIONS OF RATHER PRONOUNCED POLITICAL COLORING.

ON THE REPUBLICAN SIDE, THE COMING PRIMARY ELECTIONS SHOULD FAVOR RONALD REAGAN WHOSE CONSERVATIVE VIEWS ARE SHARED IN MUCH OF THE SOUTH AND WEST. EVEN THE WHITE HOUSE CONCEDES THAT MANY OF THESE STATES MAY GO AGAINST

THE PRESIDENT, ALTHOUGH MISTER FORD'S SUPPORTERS BELIEVE HE WILL BENEFIT FROM HIS RECENT STRONG SHOWINGS IN MICHIGAN AND MARYLAND. THE REAL QUESTION HERE IS WHETHER THE PRESIDENT HAS REGAINED SUFFICIENT MOMENTUM TO OFFSET THE SEEMING ADVANTAGES OF HIS CHALLENGER.

AS FOR THE DEMOCRATS, JIMMY CARTER SHOULD DO WELL IN HIS NATIVE SOUTH, BUT HE FACES STRONG OPPOSITION ELSEWHERE FROM HIS TWO NEW RIVALS -- GOVERNOR JERRY BROWN AND SENATOR FRANK CHURCH, BOTH WESTERNERS. MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT THE MOST INTERESTING, AND PERHAPS REVEALING, CONTEST OF THE NEXT TEN WILL BE IN OREGON, A FAR-WESTERN STATE TRADITIONALLY RECEPTIVE TO LIBERALS OF BOTH PARTIES.

BUT WHATEVER HAPPENS BETWEEN NOW AND JUNE FIRST IS LIKELY TO BE MERE PRELUDE TO THE CRUCIAL ELECTIONS OF JUNE EIGHTH. ON THAT DAY, VOTERS IN THREE OF THE NATION'S NINE MOST POPULOUS STATES -- CALIFORNIA, OHIO AND NEW JERSEY -- MAY WELL SETTLE ONE OR BOTH OF THE PARTY NOMINATING CONTESTS. BUT LIKE A GOOD MYSTERY, EVEN THAT IS FAR FROM CERTAIN. FOR IF NONE OF THE CANDIDATES CAN ESTABLISH A COMMANDING LEAD IN THESE REMAINING PRIMARY WEEKS, THE ULTIMATE DECISIONS WILL BE LEFT TO THE PARTY CONVENTIONS WHERE AT LONG LAST THAT FINAL CHAPTER WILL BE WRITTTEN.

PBM